





THE INTER-STATE SLAVE TRADE.

BY JOHN G. PALFREY.

It is only about seventy years since Clarkson, Wilberforce, and their philanthropic associates began to move the British legislature for the abolition of the African slave trade. Every obstacle which the basest cupidity could contrive was placed in their way. The West India interest worked upon the commercial interest, and both together upon the manufacturing interest, and all three upon the landed interest, and the united four upon the ministry and Parliament. Liverpool and Bristol, with millions invested in the nefarious business, raised as holy a howl as New York did four years ago when the Union was in danger. In his place in the House of Lords; a prince of the blood presumed to stigmatize Wilberforce and his friends as "either fanatics or hypocrites." He lived to set his name as king to the immortal act which abolished slavery from the British dominions. His throne might have been overset by this time if he had stuck to the doctrines of his misguided youth.

In monarchical England there was a power too strong for princes or ministers, planters or spinners, merchants or landed gentlemen, or all of them together. It was a plain common sense, informed by a moral and religious sense, in the minds and hearts of the British people. By dint of industrious writing and talking through some five and twenty years, that sentiment got its peremptory voice heard in Parliament; and then omnipotent Parliament made known to Liverpool and Bristol merchant that, if he did not want to go to Botany Bay for fourteen years, he must let alone dealing in dark-colored men — an alternative of which it changed the terms a little, a few years afterwards, by substituting hanging for transportation. And so a hitherto creditable business fell into great disesteem, in which condition it has remained in England to this day. Not a decent man is known to have been hung under that law. The decent men took note of it, and mended their manners in time.

Plenty of fortunes have been made in America in the same way;

and seventy years ago the men who made them held up their heads as high as their neighbors on exchanges and in drawing rooms. The carriages which had been set up by owners and masters of slave ships might be seen quite lately. Horrible traditions, of no ancient date, are still current at Bristol and Newport. But the thing has had its day. Since 1820, if a man be caught at this business, he must end his days on the gallows in America as surely as in England. And so wholesome is the provision, that a person suspected of dealing in Guinea slaves is now *taboo* among people who are choice as to their company; and such is the further effect of this social frown, that whoever means to make money, and at the same time keep on fair terms with the circles, finds it indispensable to pursue the former object by some other use of his talents than that of trading in his Maker's image in ebony.

So far, so good. But what remains to be wondered at and grieved over is, that the law should make such a parade of its own inconsistency. According to the law, it is not the act that makes the crime, but the place where the act is committed. If an American deals in slaves on the Guinea Coast, and we can lay hands on him, we hang him, not only without scruple, but with uncommon satisfaction. But nobody has a right to touch a hair of his head for carrying on the same business in Virginia. The slaves may be his own children, and still the business is perfectly legal, and, according to the local opinion, not disreputable. Judge Washington, at his slave barrack overlooking the Potomac, may do just what Mongo John does at his barracoon on the Rio Pongo, and yet continue to be a much-considered judge of the Supreme Court of the United States, and to have as good estimation with his neighbors as Mongo John with his. If Judge Washington had conducted himself in this manner on the Rio Pongo, and Mongo John at Mount Vernon, the law would have noosed Judge Washington, while John's fellow-citizens might have seated him in Congress or on the bench of the Supreme Court.

Importation from abroad being a hanging business, the domestic trade thrives in the absence of competition. Guinea proper being driven out of the market, the northern slave States, and especially Virginia, become the American Slave Coast. Virginia breeds men for exportation as Vermont breeds horses. The thing is no secret, and the breeders, on their own ground, take no shame to themselves, though our late minister, Mr. Stevenson, was annoyed by the charge in England, and denied it. "The six thousand slaves which Virginia annually sends off to the south are a source of wealth to Vir-

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 ginia." So wrote, in 1832, Professor Dew, of the College of William and Mary, in that State. "Virginia," he continued, "is in fact a negro-raising State for other States." "Negroes," said the Virginia Enquirer eight years ago, "have become the only reliable staple of the tobacco-growing sections of Virginia — the only reliable means of liquidating debts, foreign and domestic."

The African slave trade was made a felony in England and the United States because humanity in those nations cried out against it as an intolerable abomination. How much less detestable an abomination is the Virginian slave trade?

In some respects it is less horrible; in others it is more so.

The sufferings of slaves in the "middle passage," or sea voyage, are probably not quite paralleled in their transfer from one slave State to another. The poor creatures, in the latter case, are not so crowded together, nor put to such distress for want of food, water, and air as when stowed in bulk between the decks of a Captain Canot's little slave schooner; though any one who has seen a coffle of them on their journey, the men in pairs, handcuffed and chained to the opposite sides of an iron bar, and the women and children, tied to each other, driven behind them by armed brutes on horseback, will be apt to think that it is only by comparison with something still more wretched if their misery is not to be called extreme. Here is a picture drawn by a gentleman, since Secretary of the Navy, who, when he came to covet office, was fain to eat his words.

"The sun was shining out very hot, and in turning an angle of the road, we encountered the following group: first a little cart drawn by one horse, in which five or six naked black children were tumbled like pigs together. The cart had no covering, and they seemed to have been actually broiled to sleep. Behind the cart marched three black women, with head, neck, and breasts uncovered, and without shoes or stockings. Next came three men bare-headed, half naked, and chained together with an ox chain. Last of all came a white man on horseback, carrying pistols in his belt, and who, as we passed him, had the impudence to look us in the face without blushing. I should like to see him hunted by bloodhounds."

The original of this sketch, on a much larger scale, is a familiar sight, in the proper season, in the transit states.

Nor as to mere loss of life is the excess of the African slave trade, as compared with the American, so large as is commonly supposed. The rice, cotton, and sugar regions are notoriously un-

healthy. Persons not natives do not pass their summers in those regions if they can help it, lest their first summer should be their last. To an immigrant, spending his first summer under the scorching sun in a rice ditch or a cane field, a black skin is insufficient protection. Accordingly, *acclimation* is one of the most familiar elements of a bargain in the article. The advertisements of prime negroes in the more southerly slave States constantly describe them as *acclimated*. Why? Of course with a view to a better price. And why a better price? Of course because slaves not acclimated are more likely to die on the buyer's hands. In what proportion more likely to die? A writer in the *New Orleans Argus*, on the cultivation of sugar, says, "The loss by death in bringing slaves from a northern climate, which our planters are under the necessity of doing, is not less than twenty-five per cent." It is likely he is not far from right. He wrote on the spot; there was no occasion for overstatement; and such results of experience, affecting the prices current of a great article of merchandise, are just as accurately noted and determined as the facts that fix our rates of marine and life insurance are noted and ciphered out by us. But if twenty-five *per cent.* is the actual ratio of loss of life in the internal slave trade, it is very little, if at all, less than that of the African slave trade used to be, the horrors of "the middle passage" included. Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton computed that proportion to be nearly one third. Newton placed it at one quarter.

But supposing a less amount of mortality and of physical suffering, in the process of sending to market the home-made commodity of white Colonel Horseracer, of Albemarle, than takes place among the prisoners shipped by black Prince Bumbo in the Bight of Benin, other circumstances tend to throw the balance of agony on the other side. Compared with the Guinea negro, his brother in Virginia is a civilized and cultivated person. He has much more of local attachment, of love for wife, children, and friends, to make him wretched when he is torn away from them, or they from him, never to see or hear from one another more. Comparatively he has sensibility, reflection, and forethought; he can look backward and forward, and each view brings aggravations to his woe. Between the two sufferers there is all the difference as to mental distress that there is difference in the respective capacities of suffering between a human being scarcely raised above brute life and another of some culture of the mind and affections. Accordingly a person who will oe at the pains may collect any number of perfectly well-authenti-

cated instances of suicides committed under these circumstances, with occasional killing of children by their parents to save them from the dreaded doom. The same Secretary of the Navy before quoted from had some account from one of the dealers of a bad speculation of this kind in a young mulatto girl.

"I swore most bitterly I was only to take her to her mother's at —, and she went with me, though she seemed to doubt me. But when she discovered that we were out of the State, I thought she would go mad; and in fact the next night she drowned herself in the river close by. I lost a good five hundred dollars."*

The weak attempt to qualify the indignation of humanity and Christianity at such proceedings by a denial that separations of families are an incident of slave sales is too preposterous upon its face to require any refutation. How likely is it that of people who can make up their minds to buy and sell wives and husbands, parents and children, brothers, sisters, and so on, any considerable number will be so scrupulous as to lose a good bargain rather than hurt the feelings of the article bought and the article rejected? But if any one is doubtful on this point, let him step into the nearest reading room and look at the first column that comes in his way of the advertisements daily issued in the southern newspapers. Or, if more convenient, he may find ample specimens of them in various books which are easily accessible; for instance, in that unanswered and unanswerable treatise, Mrs. Beecher Stowe's "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin." Messrs. Mayhew, Bliss, & Co., of New Orleans, advertise negroes "to be sold separately or together as desired." Mr. Benjamin Davis, of Hamburg, South Carolina, will sell "small

* Extracts from a letter to the writer from a gentleman in Washington:—

"Williams & Co., of this city, sold a woman and two children to a slave-dealing house in Alexandria. While they were imprisoned, she murdered the children, and the purchaser sued the vender for selling him a vicious slave."

"Williams & Co., (I think — perhaps their predecessors) of this city, bought a mother and two children near Rockville, Maryland, brought them here, and put them in their own prison on Seventh Street and Maryland Avenue. The mother murdered her two children, and then took her own life. My authority was a dark intimation in the National Intelligencer that a horrid deed had occurred in the city; and this was explained to me by the people here as referring to this murder and suicide. No one here ever doubted the facts, so far as I have information, though I had no other proof than that stated."

"Another was that of a young woman who threw herself from the long bridge. The story has been poetically told by Grace Greenwood. Another was the case of a young man employed in a *restaurant* in one of the lower rooms of the Capitol. He learned that his master had sold him; he fled, was overtaken, and while his captors were preparing the irons, he took a knife from his pocket and cut his throat. This occurred some two years since."

girls, suitable for nurses, and several small boys, without their mothers." Mr. Benjamin Little, of Memphis, Tennessee, has for sale "likely young negroes." Mr. T. B. McClendon, "having located in Lynchburg, (Virginia,) is giving the highest cash prices for negroes between the ages of ten and thirty years." Mr. Seth Woodroof "continues in market for negroes of both sexes, between the ages of ten and thirty years." Mr. A. A. McLean, General Agent, Cherry Street, Nashville, "wants to purchase immediately twenty-five likely negroes, male and female, between the ages of fifteen and twenty years." Mr. S. N. Brown, of Montgomery, Alabama, "has now on hand, of his own selection and purchasing, a lot of likely young negroes, consisting of men, boys, and women, field hands, and superior house servants." &c. Messrs. Sanders & Foster, of the same place, "intend to keep constantly on hand a large assortment of negroes, comprising every description." And so on, to any extent to which the inquirer may incline to go. How are these "selections" and "assortments" made? Nature does not make them. She puts young and old, coachmen and housemaids, children and their mothers, together in one group, and binds them so with strong ties, and when they are *assorted* into different lots, it is not without much laceration of heartstrings, nor without great violence to nature, and impious defiance of nature's God. The friends so separated — separated by force, or what may be even more cruel, treacherously, and without the chance of a word of farewell — are parted never to see each other more on earth — the one never to hear of the others more unless by some rare accident, never to know where they live or when they die. The Presbyterian synod of the slave State of Kentucky, in an address to the churches under its care, before synods and other such bodies got silenced, thus condensed its observations on this subject: —

"Brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives, are torn asunder, and permitted to see each other no more. These acts are daily occurring in the midst of us. The shrieks and the agony often witnessed on such occasions proclaim, with a trumpet tongue, the iniquity of our system. There is not a neighborhood where these heart-rending scenes are not displayed; there is not a village or road that does not behold the sad procession of manacled outcasts, whose mournful countenances tell that they are exiled by force from all that their hearts hold dear."

It would be very interesting to know by what figure we are to multiply the bitter distress of each single doom of this kind, in

order to get at the sum total of woe ; in other words, to know what number of persons are subjects of the inter-state slave trade. It has been estimated as high as an average of forty thousand annually ; and there appears no room to doubt that in some years, as in 1835 and 1836, this estimate was below the reality. An easy computation from the census tables (which, unfortunately, in such matters can by no means be relied upon as telling the whole truth) indicates the number to be, on an average, something over twenty thousand a year. The decennial ratio of increase in slaves in the United States for fifty years preceding 1840 (and of course preceding the admission of Texas) was as follows, viz. : between 1790 and 1800, 27.9 ; between 1800 and 1810, 33.4 ; between 1810 and 1820, 29.1 ; between 1820 and 1830, 30.61 ; between 1830 and 1840, 23.8. (See "Report of the Superintendent of the Census for December 1, 1852," p. 153.) The average of these decennial ratios is 28.96. Apply it to the *slave-exporting* States ; viz., Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, the two Carolinas, Kentucky, and Tennessee, with the District of Columbia, (for we will leave out of the account the large number of transfers which undoubtedly takes place between states classed respectively as *exporting* and *importing*, as from Virginia to South Carolina, and from Missouri to Mississippi.) In 1840 the States and Territory just named held 1,484,195 slaves. Increasing in the ratio of 28.96 *per cent.* in ten years, they should have had, in 1850, 1,914,017. In fact, according to the census, they had only 1,703,936, leaving a difference of 210,081, or something more than 21,000 a year, to be accounted for by emigration. On the other hand, the number of slaves in the *slave-importing* States — viz., Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri — in 1840 was 1,002,031. Increasing in the ratio of 28.96 *per cent.* in ten years, their number in 1850 should have been 1,292,219 ; the census of that year, however, ascertained it to be 1,429,544. In other words, they had received 137,325, or 13,732 each year, by importation. But the exporting States had sent out 21,008 each year. What became of the residue of 72,756 — the annual residue of 7,275 — more than one third of the number sold out of the northern slave States ? Some of them went to Texas ; by no means the larger part, however ; for Texas, with all its various sources of supply, importations before the annexation, importations from the neighboring and from more northerly States, and from natural increase, had only 53,346 slaves in 1850. To say that Texas received one third of the residue in question would be to allow an excessive propor-

tion. Account in this way for an annual average of 2,276 in the ten years from 1840 to 1850, (during only one third of which time Texas was in our possession,) it follows that an annual average of 5,000, or close upon one quarter of the whole number annually exported from the slave-raising States, are lost sight of after the time of exportation. In other words, they perish in the miseries of the land "middle passage," and the "acclimation."

Such, very imperfectly sketched, and with a total omission of some material views, are the nature and extent of the inter-state slave trade. Whatever may be other political relations of slavery, the remedy for the unutterable wickedness of this traffic is in the hands of that Congress of the United States to which the free States send a majority of members. "Congress," says the Federal Constitution, (Art. 1, sec. 8.) "shall have power to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States." Under the authority given in the former clause, Congress made the African slave trade a felony; the latter clause gives Congress the same power to deal in the same way with the American slave trade. It has actually legislated under the authority of this latter clause. The act of March 2, 1807, prohibits the transportation of slaves from one State to another in vessels of less than forty tons burden. An extension of the provisions of this act to vessels of any tonnage whatever would put a stop to this business as part of the coasting trade. The constitution further provides (Art. 1, sec. 9) that "the migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight." To provide that importation should not be prohibited before 1808 was to provide by implication that it might be prohibited after that year; and accordingly the federal legislature has in fact prohibited it since 1808 by law. The constitutional provision respecting migration is precisely the same. Ever since 1808 the legislature has had the constitutional power to prohibit the migration of slaves—a power which would long ago have been put into beneficent exercise if the spirit of the fathers had not long ago died out.

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